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INTRODUCTION.

The immense extent of the animal creation, and the boundless variety of forms which crowd upon the attention of the most desultory observer, render the acquisition of even a general and superficial knowledge of the whole science, the labour of a life. It is, indeed, the splendid and enviable lot of few, to grasp with a master mind, like that of Aristotle, of Linnæus, or of Cuvier, the whole range of the animal world; and to combine the advantages of leisure and opportunity with the power of seizing, by an almost intuitive perception, the nature and value of the relations by which beings are associated. The true naturalist, even of a humbler grade, will not indeed be satisfied without acquiring some general views of organization; but circumstances of taste or opportunity will, in most cases, point out some one or other of the larger groups, to which his attention will, for a time at least, be directed, to the comparative exclusion of the rest.

Of the various branches into which the science of Zoology has thus been divided, Erpetology, or the study of the Reptilia, has perhaps been the most neglected. The superiority of organization in the Mammifera, with the interest attached to the habits of many species, and the utility of others, administering as they do to our daily wants or comforts,—the elegance of form, the splendour of plumage, and the sweetness of note, which render the different families of Birds so attractive,—even the varied beauty of the shelly covering of the testaceous Mollusca,—but, above all, the endless varieties of form which characterize the insect tribes, and the never-ceasing fascination which the contemplation of their habits is calculated to excite, have necessarily attracted the devotion of most of the votaries of this delightful branch of natural knowledge.

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